

Over the weekend, a local building on Capitol Hill, known as "Eastern Market," burned down. The place is well known by locals in D.C. and is often frequented by members of Congress -- many of whom live nearby. On Monday, Del. Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-D.C.), was quoted in several papers stating that ... Over the weekend, a local building on Capitol Hill, known as "Eastern Market," burned down. The place is well known by locals in D.C. and is often frequented by members of Congress -- many of whom live nearby. On Monday, Del. Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-D.C.), was quoted in several papers stating that she is going to try and get federal funding to help rebuild it. Her justification for this use of taxpayer dollars was the following: "It's a popular place for members to go."

I am completely puzzled. Why in the world should the American taxpayer be asked to help pay for the rebuilding of a local market that has no connection to the federal government, except that several members of Congress live nearby?

I would submit that if Del. Holmes-Norton and other members are so concerned about rebuilding Eastern Market than they should dip into their own pockets to help out -- not just unassumingly take from the taxpayers. It sure is a lot easier to spend money when it is not yours, than when it is.

This situation is eerily similar to a story I came across after joining Congress. It was originally written by David Crockett (who happened to serve as member of Congress from 1827 to 1831 before heading off to Texas and dying at the Alamo). This is what he said:

Several years ago, I was one evening standing on the steps of the Capitol with some members of Congress, when our attention was attracted by a great light over in Georgetown. It was evidently a large fire. We jumped into a hack and drove over as fast as we could. In spite of all that could be done, many houses were burned and many families made houseless, and besides, some of them had lost all but the clothes they had on. The weather was very cold, and when I saw so many children suffering, I felt that something ought to be done for them. The next morning a bill was introduced appropriating \$20,000 for their relief. We put aside all other business and rushed it through as soon as it could be done. That summer, when running for re-election, Crockett came across a constituent who assailed him for supporting the bill. Crockett replied by saying "...certainly nobody will complain that a great and rich country like ours should give the insignificant sum of \$20,000 to relieve its suffering women and children, particularly with a full and overflowing treasury, and I am sure, if you had been there, you would have done just the same as I did."

The constituent responded: "Individual members may give as much of their own money as they please, but they have no right to touch a dollar of the public money for that purpose. If twice as many houses had been burned in this country as in Georgetown, neither you nor any other member of Congress would have thought of appropriating a dollar for our relief. There are about two hundred and forty members of Congress. If they had shown their sympathy for the sufferers by contributing each one week's pay, it would have made over \$13,000. There are plenty of wealthy men around Washington who could have given \$20,000 without depriving themselves of even a luxury of life."

The following Congress when a bill came up appropriating money for the benefit of a widow of a distinguished naval officer, Crockett rose and gave the following speech:

"Mr. Speaker--I have as much respect for the memory of the deceased, and as much sympathy for the suffering of the living, if there be, as any man in this House, but we must not permit our respect for the dead or our sympathy for part of the living to lead us into an act of injustice to the balance of the living. I will not go into an argument to prove that Congress has not the power to appropriate this money as an act of charity. Every member on this floor knows it.

We have the right as individuals, to give away as much of our own money as we please in charity; but as members of Congress we have no right to appropriate a dollar of the public money. Some eloquent appeals have been made to us upon the ground that it is a debt due the deceased. Mr. Speaker, the deceased lived long after the close of the war; he was in office to the day of his death, and I ever heard that the government was in arrears to him.

"Every man in this House knows it is not a debt. We cannot without the grossest corruption, appropriate this money as the payment of a debt. We have not the semblance of authority to appropriate it as charity. Mr. Speaker, I have said we have the right to give as much money of our own as we please. I am the poorest man on this floor. I cannot vote for this bill, but I will give one week's pay to the object, and if every member of Congress will do the same, it will amount to more than the bill asks."

Nothing was given. The bill passed. I wonder how much, if anything, would be collected today if a stunt like this was pulled on the floor for Eastern Market? Here is a link to the entire story:
<http://www.thisnation.com/library/notyourstogive.html>